

PRESS RELEASE

The Wenham & Hamilton Boards of Selectmen will jointly hold a public discussion forum at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, June 15th, in the Multi-purpose Room of the Buker School (School Street, Wenham). This forum has been scheduled in order to discuss the recent position taken by the two boards, regarding the potential regionalization of the Wenham & Hamilton public safety departments. All interested individuals are strongly encouraged to attend.

A lively public debate has occurred, over the past 12 months, about whether there are increased opportunities for cost-savings between the two towns, especially in the consolidation of all or parts of the two public safety building projects currently under design in both communities. The Selectmen have completed their review of these issues and are hoping to discuss their findings and to gain consensus as each community moves forward with the design phase of their respective public safety building projects.

Town Administrators Candace Wheeler and Jeff Chelgren have prepared a comprehensive summary of the events leading up to the current positions of the two Boards of Selectmen. That summary document can be downloaded from the Hamilton & Wenham web sites.

For more than a year, the towns have been exploring ways to optimize their building plans in the wake of voter rejections of prior proposals which were deemed too expensive. Current plans call for Hamilton to expand its police/fire station, including the joint emergency communications center, on the site where they now reside and for Wenham to incorporate a new police station in the plans for renovating its Town Hall. Both Building Committees have returned to the design process in order to prepare new plans for consideration at future Town Meeting(s).

After lengthy analysis of a report prepared by the Municipal Police Institute, the Selectmen concluded that further regionalization of either our Fire or Police Departments would face significant operational and legal challenges with little to no financial gain anticipated. The known, and unknown, costs associated with such an effort are expected to result in increased expense to both communities, especially Hamilton. For this reason, the Selectmen have directed both of their Building Committees to proceed with the design of separate public safety projects and to continue to seek opportunities to share services and/or facility spaces where advisable.

The Hamilton-Wenham League of Women Voters has played an important role in studying the advantages of increased cooperation between the two towns. In an update to the LWV membership on May 24, Susan Turnbull, LWV co-president, said, "In the end, they (Selectmen) decided not to study the issue any further and not to proceed on a joint police building, a conclusion that all of us were comfortable with."